1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
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dry brushwood have been burnt round their feet if the girdling has not prevented some sap again rising. Ultimately, if these lands do not have a long enough rest between successive clearings, the forest loses its power of regeneration; and it is to such former *dippa* or *erka* lands that the *parka* or *dahi* system described above is applied. *Dippa* is fairly common between Orcha and Chhota Dongar, and it is because there is plenty of land still available to ensure each *dippa* an adequate rest that *parka* cultivation is so uncommon. But in the more open country of the large Bison-horn Maria villages much land seems to have lost its forest regenerative power, and every remaining non-fruit tree has its boughs lopped year after year to provide fuel to be carted off to the old *erka* lands for *parka* cultivation till it looks, when its new leaves sprout, like a Lombardy poplar in shape. The raking of the ashes with the *parka-lathi* in the height of the hot weather is very exhausting, and the men who do this work often suffer for some days later from very dark-coloured urine.

Both *dippa* (*erka*) and *parka* are more advanced methods of cultivation than the Hill Maria's favourite *penda* or hill slope cultivation. For this he fells and burns the forest growth on the hill slopes, which are often very steep. Beyond roughly distributing the unburnt material over the slope, and, wearing wooden clogs or strips of *saja* bark to protect the soles of his feet, poking unburnt logs into a burning patch with long bamboo poles, he does not try to spread the ashes evenly, or use the *parka-lathi*, and consequently adjacent patches of crops vary greatly in height and density. He sows the seed broadcast in the ashes after the rains have broken, and does not attempt to dig up the soil of the slopes with his *gudari* hoe except in the few patches where the sown seed does not germinate; these he roughly scarifies and resows. The *Gazetteer* (p. 54) repeats the story that the seed is 'sown along the top of the slope from which the rain water washes it down and spreads it over the field'; the bare idea of this makes Hill and Bison-horn Maria laugh, and it is obvious that if sowing were so much left to chance, the only parts of the slope producing any crops would be the sides of the natural drainage channels. The Hill Maria does scarify his rare permanent rice fields and sometimes his *dippa* land with his hoe, and one man in three hundred may use a plough on them; but the Bison-horn Maria uses his plough on rice field, *parka* and *erka* and even occasionally on the lower and less steep parts of his *penda* slopes, while he scarifies with his hoe all that he does not plough.

In most Hill Maria parishes *penda* is the only kind of cultivation, and though in much of the Bison-horn country permanent

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of rice failures such as those of 1939 and 1940. In the former year the Marias, dismayed by the failure of rice on their plough-lands, took the law into their own hands and started cutting *podu* in the east of Garchiroli tahsil and the adjacent Partially Excluded Areas of Drug district, being to some extent incited by emissaries of the leader of an agrarian agitation in the Dondi-Lohara zamindari. It seemed to me that in their present mood they would before long again defy the restrictions and cut *podu* on a wide scale.

I recommended accordingly that their wishes should be met, as it should not be difficult to regulate *podu* by fixing a regular series of sites to be felled in two-yearly rotations. Silviculturally too there was much to be gained by this. When *podu* was first restricted and then prohibited, the miscellaneous forests were allowed to grow up just as they had been left after the last *podu* fellings, with all the old high stumps and crooked or double or treble stems. Even the patches of teak were often useless because the trees had been left to shoot from old undressed stumps. Most of this vast forest around Bhamragarh, Surjagarh and Jarawandi has no commercial value at all, and never will have unless good teak can be grown. In the neighbouring Panabaras zamindari of Drug I found that some forty years before the Court of Wards had initiated a practice of requiring *podu* cultivators to sow teak seed in the *podu* clearings before abandoning them. This did much to produce the fine forest that is now so valuable an asset of that estate. The Marias whom I met in Ahiri, Jharapapra, Aundi, Koracha, Murumgaon, Rangi and Dhanora zamindaris were most appreciative of the idea of *podu* being allowed with this condition of the sowing of teak seed in the second and last year of cultivation. All knew how the Allapilli departmental forest operation had saved the local Marias from economic ruin, and they were quick to realize that conservation of the surviving teak and the growth of teak in areas now to be selected for that purpose and sown with teak at the end of *podu* cultivation would bring teak forests, and therefore ultimately operations such as those at Allapilli, far nearer to their villages in the days of their grandchildren. Besides areas thus earmarked for teak regeneration after *podu*, there should also be fixed areas around each village where *podu* should be allowed indefinitely. The Marias also would welcome the extension to other parts of Ahiri and the other zamindaris of the precedent of the leasing by Government from the Ahiri zamindar of the forests around Allapilli: the surviving teak areas around Surajgarh would for example be suitable leased areas. In all these measures the fullest co-operation of the Marias could without much difficulty be obtained by enlisting the sympathy and support of the *bhumias*, *gaitas*, and *Sendhias*, whose authority remains real and

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241 313 unchallenged. I emphasize the word sympathy: the method of threatening and punishing the headmen must be given up, and every effort made to win their understanding support for the new measures and even to entrust them with their execution.

883 The walks and talks at Surjagarh delayed the start on the 32 miles journey to Jawarwandi, and the car and lorry were more than once bogged on the way, so that once again we arrived in camp long after dark. It was on this journey that we crossed the tongues of Bastar territory mentioned on page 378 of this Note: in the southern tongue, in fact, we were bogged for an hour or more, but, as in Bastar, were readily helped to extricate ourselves. I noticed and stopped in *gotul* or bachelors' dormitories in several villages before and after Surjagarh. Many of these are treated by touring officers as though they were rest-huts built for their special convenience, like the *chauri* of Hyderabad or Berar villages. They use them also for posting up legal notices, and in two I found nailed to the wooden posts copies of the *Yudda Samachar* or War News in the Marathi edition published by the provincial War Purposes Fund for dissemination of accurate war information in all villages; this showed singular lack of intelligence on the part of those who controlled such propaganda in Chanda district, for in these Maria villages not a person was literate and very few could speak Marathi. The *gotul* culture here must be similar to that among the Murias just across the Bastar border in North Antagarh, but in the short time available I did not overcome the Marias' natural reluctance to discuss this intimate social organization, a reluctance heightened, I suspect, by the fact that here on the fringes of the *gotul* country the institution is the butt of Hindu ridicule or prurient curiosity. But there certainly are *gotul* in these villages, at least for the youths, and I found one, with some difficulty owing to the reticence of the local Marias in these mixed villages, at Erka in Rangi zamindari. So far as I could make out, they are still to be found in the Partially Excluded zamindaris of Drug.

632 Jarawandi is the headquarters of a sub-zamindar holding under Ahiri a taluq of twenty-three villages: the rival claims of Ahiri and Jarawandi to the seignorial dues have been a nuisance to the local Marias. Here there was a large gathering of headmen and *Sendhias* of *patti* groups of villages. Enquiries from them and later at [623] Murumgaon showed that the *panchayat* system described in the extract on pages 286-8 of this book is not only as vigorous as ever, but is more widespread than previously recorded, there being *Sendhias* in almost every Chanda zamindari. It had been stated to me that the zamindars outside Ahiri had usurped the authority of the *Sendhia* and his *patti panchayat*, but I doubt the truth of this, and

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The Court of Wards finally gave the lease to a Hindu of the Kurmi caste, on a premium of Rs. 211. The present lessee, his son, was made protected in 1923. Though the aboriginals as a whole have not actually lost land since 1902, the lessee had been very oppressive, forcing the aboriginals who borrowed from him to surrender their fields to him and then selling them to new tenants. 427

In Panabaras the departmental working of the five teak forests, largely built up, as already stated, by the Court of Wards insisting from 1900 onwards on *podu* cultivators sowing teak-seed on their plots in the second year of cultivation, has done something on Allapilli lines to bring economic relief to the local aboriginals. These four estates have been special targets for the agrarian agitation already mentioned, which started from the adjacent non-excluded Dondi-Lohara zamindari and made a special feature of inciting the Gonds and Marias to burn *podu*. 313

In the Garchiroli zamindaris on the whole the Marias and other aboriginals continue to hold their own and to take gradually to permanent cultivation, though far more slowly than outsiders: in the twenty years after the 1922-3 settlement aboriginal cultivation had increased by only 23 per cent., but non-aboriginal by 50 per cent., there being 6,523 aboriginal tenants of 76,113 acres against 4,012 other tenants of 46,863 acres. The aboriginals still have miles and miles of land available for extending their cultivation, but always hanker after their beloved *podu*. 241 311

This *podu* question, as I have already said, was the principal topic at the conference of the Drug and Chanda Partially Excluded Areas zamindars at Murumgaon on New Year's Day, 1940. Other topics were the neglect of the Garchiroli zamindaris by the Chanda District Council, and the future of the zamindars, in view of the political threat to the whole zamindari system. To deal first with the last topic, let me say that while there may be much to be said for 'liquidation' of big landed estates, especially of absentee proprietors, the policy towards aboriginal zamindars should be different. Most of them are descendants of long lines of tribal chieftains holding estates on very ancient tenures dating back to the semi-tribal, semi-feudal systems[1] under which most of middle India was organised centuries ago. Properly speaking these chiefs in relation to their ryots and fellow tribesmen are *primi inter pares*. Some of the wealthier aboriginal proprietors of the huge Chhattisgarh estates may have aped the princeling: but most of the Chanda zamindars are closely akin to their people—the Rangi chief, for example, is frankly a Maria among Marias—and do their utmost to protect their ryots. Legally, so long as the proprietary rights in any 632

[1] See p. 4.

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and civil litigation in which Maria parties have been involved since this interference with their way of life, and to see also if it has had any bearing on suicide. Quite clearly, however, it has had a tremendous and adverse effect on their economics. It has accentuated their transition from an economy in kind to a cash economy and, by virtually forcing them to grow rice, a commercial food crop, as their principal crop, it has played into the hands of the *banis* and the money-lender who naturally desire to buy up rice for export. It may be suspected also that this has had an adverse effect on the diet and physique of the Maria. The small millets, which are the characteristic and favourite food of the Marias and were best grown in the *podu* clearings, are dietetically of higher value than rice. Their market value was small, but so long as the Marias' granary had ample stores of these millets, he had not to depend upon the money-lender for seed or cattle, nor to bother about marketing his produce. The only partial remedy so far provided for the economic ills caused by the stopping of *podu* has been the departmental forest work at Allapilli. Here the Maria, doing work of a type for which his life in the forest suits him and receiving fair and prompt cash payment for his labour, has been able to earn money which could keep him out of the clutches of the money-lender and the bribe-taker. But this too has had its detribalizing effect, accustoming him to working far from his home village and in close contact with an alien civilization and culture.

The next difficulties that the Maria has to solve in assimilating himself to the life of modern India are the problems resulting from the impact of political India with its steady tendency to seek to reduce all things and all institutions throughout India to a drab uniformity. There is no doubt that the Maria is not ready to exercise the vote. It is equally clear that he has his own vigorous tribal organization and that his *patti panchayat* could easily be entrusted with the same powers that have been given to the village and *pargana panchayats* in Bastar. It seems obvious also that on these *panchayats* could be based some sort of system whereby Marias could handle the problems of local self-government in their country. These *panchayats*, for example, if entrusted with the selection of local Marias for a zamindari *panchayat*, could produce a body in real touch with tribal life in all its facets. Tribal village life is still naturally co-operative, even though in the plains individualism is now stronger than in the largely collective villages of the Hills. In fact the whole *podu* system was an incentive to the co-operation of all the villagers; rice cultivation, in contrast, drives villagers into individualism and ideas of private property as indeed does the whole land revenue system which has been